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AUTHOR Roskos, Kathleen
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ABSTRACT

In these politically charged times of early literacy initiatives, position statements, and education reform, talk about play and literacy learning seems rather awkward, if not even a bit silly. As the realities of early literacy education set in, teachers, legislators, and parents grow ever more critical of what young children are doing as developing writers and readers, and how they are doing it. After all, children need to develop phonemic awareness, learn letter names, practice recognizing words, and participate actively in storybook reading to acquire basic literacy concepts. These are intensely instructive activities best led by adults who impart essential literacy knowledge and skills that children must learn. Certainly this is a serious business, and the time and energy it demands can overwhelm thoughts of play. But the worry is that the important role of play in the process of learning to read and write might be misunderstood, if not overlooked altogether. This paper shares this worry, and, in attempting to assuage it, discusses some fundamental connections between literacy and play, the mental constructions they support, and how both might be strengthened in everyday literacy teaching and learning in early childhood classrooms, using an art studio play setting as a research lesson. Contains 3 figures and 19 references; cites 10 children's books. Appended is an overview of the thematic unit. Also attached is a discussion forum. (Author/NKA)

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Creating Connections, Building Constructions: Language, Literacy, and Play in Early Childhood

By Kathleen Roskos with Oula Majzoub Hanbali

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Creating Connections, Building Constructions
Language, Literacy, and Play in Early Childhood

An Invited Commentary

Kathleen Roskos,
with Oula Majzoub Hanbali
John Carroll University
University Heights, Ohio, USA

Note: After reading this article, please visit the transcript of the discussion forum to view readers' comments. For links to related postings in *Reading Online,* click here.

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Connections and Constructions

If we traced the rich histories of play and beginning literacy as topics of study in the area of early childhood, we would see straight away that their paths have only recently crossed. Prior to the 1980s, studies of play in early childhood largely examined relationships between playing and children's cognitive development. The goal was to determine if certain processes of play, such as pretending, influenced specific mental processes, such as symbolic representation. Studies of beginning reading, on the other hand, pursued the identification of reading readiness factors, such as visual discrimination, that might support the "learning to read" process (Bond & Dykstra, 1997). What children gained from playing and what they needed for learning to read and write seemed distant cousins.

But in more recent times, the discovery that literacy develops before schooling and includes a lengthy emergent phase has turned attention squarely on the role of play in this process (e.g., Jacob, 1984). For nearly two decades now, researchers have described different facets of literacy-play links, with fruitful results. Several observations seem valid based on descriptive research and suggest that literacy and play are more closely related than once thought (see, e.g., Christie, 1994; Morrow & Rand, 1991; Neuman & Roskos, 1990, 1992, 1997; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Pellegrini, Galda, Dresden, & Cox, 1991; Roskos & Christie, 2000; Rowe, 1998):

1. It is clear that young children naturally incorporate literacy activity into their play. Literacy, in other words, is not an unwanted intruder into play experiences. When playing grocery store, children spontaneously scribble shopping lists; playing "babies," they readily pretend to read storybooks to their make-believe children. As the "stuff" of play, children bring what they know to their playing, which often includes the literacy practices they see in everyday life and playfully mimic. While these sorts of behaviors have been going on for a long time, it is only recently that we have begun to recognize them

as evidence of emerging literacy.

2. It's also quite clear that the amount of play children do with literacy is influenced by the physical and social environments in which they play. Play settings that richly offer children literacy-related ideas (e.g., playing post office), props (e.g., books), and tools (e.g., pencils) stimulate more reading and writing interactions than do play places that are less well provisioned. This is a robust finding reported by educators across countries and cultures (Campbell, 1998; Schroeder, 1996). From her work in Icelandic preschools, for example, Einarsdottir (2000) described the power of literacy resources and print visibility for enhancing children's literacy behaviors, interests, and knowledge.

   The social environment is also tremendously influential on literacy in play activity. Studies show, for example, the importance of adults' role in modeling and supporting literacy play. When adults facilitate literacy activity in the context of play, children respond warmly by following their lead and joining in reading and writing activity they might not otherwise have experienced.

3. It's becoming clearer that in play and literacy, certain foundational mental processes may be shared. The mental work of letting something "stand for" or represent something else in play (e.g., "Let's pretend this rug is the beach, OK?"), for example, is akin to understanding that written words represent language. Likewise, the mental effort to build a pretend play story ("Let's pretend the baby's sick and we has to take care of it") involves elements structurally similar to those found in comprehending and composing written stories. Opportunities to engage in quality play, therefore, may help strengthen these mental processes, thus building children's capacities to deal with the complex demands of printed texts.

At this historical juncture then, where literacy and play clearly cross paths, we can derive at least two strong inferences about the play-literacy relationship without stretching too far beyond the facts. One is that play makes sense as a curricular tool for teaching literacy in the early years. Play obviously presents an attractive opportunity for children to demonstrate what they know about reading and writing and to encounter new ideas about literacy.

As straightforward as this seems, however, incorporating play into the learning-to-read process faces some tough challenges. Traditional views of play as children's "business" and a "recess" from the mental work of difficult learning are pervasive and deep-seated. Parents, many teachers, and adults in general do not view play as a "real" opportunity for academic learning (such as learning to read and write) to occur -- even though, as I have observed, the play context can be enriched to provide such opportunity. To adjust this perception in favor of play as a genuine curricular tool in early literacy education will require considerable persuasion and explanation. How play connects to literacy needs to be widely broadcast in plain terms, and we need to work harder to provide evidence of the benefits of play for literacy development.

A second strong inference we can draw is the constructive power of language to build relationships between reading, writing, and playing. Language is the energy, so to speak, of the literacy-play link. It is the mental process that *carries* the connections between play activity and literacy activity. As fundamental to interaction, language sparks the organization of ideas, the narrating of events, and the naming of objects associated with literacy in the play setting. In play, children use language to realize their own purposes and potentials, but in so doing they also practice (a lot) the essential communication skills that underlie literacy -- telling, narrating, and describing. Rich, elaborated play demands rich, elaborated talk that gives rise to the dynamic use of language in ways that build the foundations of literacy processes and skills.

These two inferences lead us to a practical realization, I think, and that is the importance of creating conditions for language-filled play in literacy-rich classroom environments. While we know some about the critical features of these conditions -- such as time for play, access to print and literacy resources, and opportunity to engage in literate acts -- we need to learn more from research and from one another to realize the literacy potential of play. This involves not only systematic inquiry, but also discussing, thinking through, questioning, and sharing ideas with one another, often and thoughtfully, so as to expand our vision of what literacy teaching and learning in play can be.

In the next section I take up this matter in the format of what the Japanese term a *koukai kenkyuu jugyou,* or "public research lesson" (Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998). The research lesson is an actual classroom lesson, but it also embodies a particular goal or vision of education -- in our case, the play setting as a context for literacy

teaching and learning in the early years. The purpose is to observe this goal brought to life in a real classroom, to critically discuss what we see, and to take away from this discussion new ideas and insights that deepen personal understanding.

Focus of the Research Lesson

It is widely accepted these days that preschool and primary grade classrooms should be print-rich places that provide abundant opportunities for children to read and write. Plenty of books, displays of children's work, well-provisioned activity centers, labels and messages that describe and inform -- these are the telltale signs of a literate place. How to build, maintain, and actively involve young children in a literate environment, however, remains a challenging endeavor for most teachers because the essential goal is an educative one. Children are to learn more about reading and writing through their interactions with their immediate literate environment. We want them to gain new skills, learn new words, meet new ideas, and at the same time practice and secure what they know to new levels of competence. Creating an environment that supports and expands literacy learning in these ways is not simple. It requires bringing together space, time, materials, and activity in deliberate ways that create communication as well interactions between children and things in a "network of possible connections and constructions" (Gandini in Vecchi, 1998, p. 163). This demands considerable forethought, deliberation, design, and commitment to transform the elements of environment into literacy learning opportunities.

Let's take up the research lesson at hand. What we have are examples drawn from a thematic unit entitled "Colors, Dots, Objects, Shapes, and Drips: Making Impressions in Art" that was carried out in a diverse classroom of 4-year-olds (9 boys and 8 girls) at Hathaway Brown School in Shaker Heights, Ohio, USA. Building off children's enthusiasm surrounding a trip to the local art museum, the teachers' intentions in this theme were to feature five modern artists and the critical elements of their style: Claude Monet, colors; Paul Seurat, dots; Jasper Johns, objects; Pablo Picasso, shapes; and Jackson Pollock, drips. In helping the children explore and experience these artists' work on their own terms the teachers had three broad instructional aims:

1. To promote creative representation through art media
2. To support children's ability to classify and describe images
3. To develop their ability to make comparisons between images and pictures (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995)

Specific to literacy, the teachers were guiding the children to use language to describe, to explore writing and writing tools, to read in various ways (storybooks, signs, symbols, and their own writing), and to actively participate in story dictation related to classroom experiences. They engaged the children, for example, in a text innovation based on Dr. Seuss's *My Many Colored Days* that produced a beautiful big book telling about the children's "many colored days." They also helped the children write their impressions of art pieces and explain their own creative pieces.

As in many early childhood classrooms, the play environment was arranged to support the ideas, vocabulary, and objects of the theme in a variety of ways. For the "Making Impressions..." theme, the entire classroom was transformed into an atelier, an art studio that included a workshop for creating with media, a book-browsing area for looking and reading, a writing table for composing, a bookmaking area for organizing and compiling, and a storybook reading area for listening to books and sharing. A sampling of the material, resources, and activities built into these places is provided in Figure 1. The teachers also incorporated a fine blend of related storybooks and informational texts into the course of the theme, such as *Round Trip* by Ann Jonas, *Mouse Paint* by Ellen Stoll Walsh, *People* and *Places: The Museum of Modern Art* by Philip Yenawine, *The Science Book of Color* by Neil Ardley, and *Color* by Christina Rossetti, to name a few.

Figure 1
Art Studio Play Settings

Examples of Materials and Activities for...

Creating	Browsing	Writing	Bookmaking	Reading
Making art pieces:	picture books	make a journal page	Group Artists' Book	*My Many Colored Days*
mosaics	storybooks	letters/words on the color wheel	individual *My Many Colored Days*	*The Art Lesson*
sand structures	posters	play with rebus messages		*Of Colors & Things*
wood sculptures	children's work			*The Science of Color*
easel painting				
Exploring color and media:				
mixing colors				
hidden colors				
color wheel				

The object of our *koukai kenkyuu jugyou* (public research lesson) is the quality of the play environment turned art studio as a context for early literacy experience. First we will examine the environment as a physical setting supportive of literacy interactions and development. A series of photographs, taken from different perspectives in the classroom, are presented, along with a print inventory of the setting. We will study the physical setting with three design criteria (to be described in a moment) in mind.'The second half of the lesson focuses on two short video clips representative of children's activity in the art studio. Here we will pay special attention to children's language and literacy, looking for the "connections and constructions" that help them learn to read and write. Once again we will rely on several criteria to guide our observing and assessing.

The Art Studio as a Literacy-Rich Environment

Research in the area of learning environments indicates three design features of settings that support literacy development (Roskos & Neuman, in press). One is the widespread *presence of print* across the setting in ways that are attractive and appealing to young children. Print should be at children's eye level, for example, presented in a variety of formats (e.g., books, signs, children's writing, environmental print, labels, directions, etc.), and abundant.

Another feature has to do with the *concept of proximity,* which means that the literacy environment should be matched physically and psychologically to the young readers and writers using it. Literacy, in other words, needs to be within children's reach physically and also mentally, which is to say that it should connect to children's culture, their language, and thinking, as well as their interests and preferences. Physical literacy objects and tools should be safe, authentic, and useful, while literacy concepts, processes, and skills should be within children's grasp and rooted in their real-life experiences.

Third, the literacy environment should be *productive* in that it "teaches" about reading and writing. It should lead children to new ideas about the print-sound code, about getting meaning from texts, and about the habits of healthy readers and writers. It should contextualize print so children can easily experience print's usefulness (e.g., as a source of information); feel what it offers as a source of pleasure (e.g., book browsing); and realize what it supports as a means of personal expression (e.g., drawing, writing, playing with print).

Let's apply these three criteria to the art studio setting and comment on its strengths and weaknesses as a literacy-rich environment, keeping in mind that a few photographs cannot capture the totality of the setting. What follows is a series of photographs that highlight the environment. (Images are available only in the version of the article intended for on-screen viewing.) Using the literacy environment checklist in Figure 2, examine each photograph carefully and record evidence of presence, proximity, and productivity features that you can see or reasonably infer based on the lesson description and your own experience. Feel free to look at the photographs several times as you consider the literacy quality of the environment. When you're finished, read on to learn what others thought about the art studio as a literacy-rich environment.

Figure 2
Observational Tool: The Literacy-Rich Environment

Feature	Yes	Some	No
Presence of print (abundance and variety) Evidence:			
Proximity (within children's reach physically and mentally) Evidence:			
Productivity (print-sound code, getting meaning, habits and interests) Evidence:			

Images from the Classroom

[*Note:* Images are not available to print with this version of the commentary and can only be viewed in the online version at http://www.readingonline.org/articles/roskos/studio.html.]

Observations and Discussion

What were your overall impressions of the art studio as a literacy environment? Studying these photographs live with a group of early childhood teachers, we agreed that they showed ample presence of print. Print in varied forms was distributed throughout the play environment -- for example, in the dictated stories on the art pieces, in the assorted books in the storybook reading area, in labels and signs, and even on the color wheel. But we noticed there was not much children's writing evident in these images, and that sometimes the print seemed to be placed too high, as in the "I like cookies" information next to the computer area. One of the teachers in our discussion group mentioned that due to space limitations in her classroom, she often moves

older, more familiar print material higher up the wall to make room for newer, more current print at children's eye level. This may be the case in this classroom, too.

As for proximity, we thought that the print and writing tools seemed well within children's physical reach and that, based on the lesson and our own sense of what was probably going on, literacy activity was well matched to the children's lived experiences. All had visited the art museum, for example, so had some acquaintance with the artists and their work. Although highly authentic, the one item we questioned was the color wheel, which some thought too abstract for young children: a color bar or rainbow might be more meaningful and informative at this age. For the most part, we agreed, the physical evidence suggested that children could relate to the fundamental artistic elements of color, shape, object, and style, which were presented in plain language and connected to good examples. They could listen to stories and information in the storybook area, and share in writing their own stories in the bookmaking center. As photographs 4 and 5 show, children were given opportunities to use their own language to express their thinking through the dictations that documented their observations, ideas, and creative expression. In sum, reading and writing activity was within the reach of these children's hands and minds, thus accessible to them as a tool for exploring, thinking, and learning.

From our discussion, we decided, however, that the productivity of the environment was less developed than the features of presence and proximity. Some cited the lack of displayed children's writing as an indicator that children may not have been sufficiently challenged to explore and use the print-sound code in their play and project work. Others questioned how children were encouraged to use print to complete activities, such as following steps to mix colors or documenting their own work. We saw little evidence of play-inspired writing as a result of role-taking and pretend-play stories, though this is not to say that it did not occur. But others pointed out that, according to the lesson plan, the children did collectively make a big book, which they enjoyed reading and rereading. They also kept personal journals and composed individual pieces about the five artists' work as well as their own. This recounting and explaining allowed many opportunities to practice matching sound and letter, talk and print, and also to rehearse getting meaning from print. The environment, in sum, was moderately productive in our judgment in that it prompted children to read, write, and grapple with the print-sound code in purposeful ways.

All in all, we viewed the atelier as a good print environment that offered children examples and opportunities to use reading and writing in their play and projects. Based on your observations, you may agree. Although, like us, you may have observed some room for improvement, we all recognize that the pictures alone do not give us access to the full richness of the classroom setting -- but enough to stimulate thinking in relation to our own practice.

The Art Studio as a Language-Filled Environment

Play is an activity thick with opportunities to use language. To play along, children need to communicate with one another, and use of language through talk quickly becomes the tool for building meaning in play activity. Children's talk in play situations has been well researched, showing evidence of three features associated with language development and early literacy (Goelman & Pence, 1994). One is children's growing ability to use language to tell their own thinking and to comment on language itself. Children, for example, often point to and label items or ideas as they play ("This is the appointments book, OK? We put the names in here.") and they use words to talk about words ("This sign says 'open.' When you turn it, it says 'closed.'"). Play is an activity that pushes children to *name,* to *tell,* and to *report* -- all language uses that build literacy foundations.

Children also use cohesive devices to help interweave their play exchanges together into meaningful wholes. They start to listen to their play partners, in other words, and to knit together a conversation or "story." This emerging ability to use language so as to "take a turn" about a common topic builds the notion of temporal sequencing and is the basis of narrative. Pretend play in particular encourages storymaking, which maps onto children's understanding of story structure in texts.

A third feature of play talk is the cognitive demands it can place on children's use of language. In an effort to maintain play, children may be called upon to recall sequences ("Do you remember how this game works?"), provide explanations ("You don't buy books from the library, Nathan; you borrow them.") and to answer

specific questions about the mechanics of literacy ("Josh, how do you make a B? Like this?"). Such demands pull children into using the language of description and inquiry, which develops vocabulary, problem solving, and questioning. These kinds of talk, as we know, spill over into the language of written discourse, which demands language uses often far removed from first-hand experience.

Returning to our research lesson, let's watch two video clips of play in the art studio. The focus of our looking -- or, more precisely, our listening -- is the children's talk. We are searching for evidence of children using language to "tell" to build a conversation or story, or to inquire and describe at some length. Presence of these talk features will assure us that the play is supporting literacy -- and, if by chance linked to literate roles and acts, all the more so. Using the checklist in Figure 3 to guide your looking, view the video clip series to gather impressions on the language environment.

Figure 3
Observational Tool: The Language-Filled Environment

Feature	Yes	Some	No
Telling and reporting (labeling, making comparisons, referring to events) Evidence:			
Conversing and storymaking (turn taking, pretending, collaborating) Evidence:			
Observing and inquiring (predicting, questioning, explaining) Evidence:			

Before proceeding to the clips, a few details about each one may prove helpful. In the first, referred to as the "Nobody" clip, the teacher is sitting with children at the writing table. The children are using rebus pictures to make messages, and the need arises to spell the word *nobody*. Watch how the teacher guides the children through this task. In clip 2, entitled the "Sinking Flower" clip, two girls are creating art pieces with paint.. They practice a technique they invented called "scribble-scrabble," and in using it to paint they create the sinking flower story. Note how the story is constructed through a combination of language and gesture. As before, examine the clips as often as you like and record your observations. Then read on to find out how several other early childhood teachers responded.

A technical note: The video files are large -- 14 MB and 20 MB -- and will take some time to download, even with a high-speed Internet connection. If you need to download a video player plug-in, following are three no-cost options:

- To download QuickTime, click here
- To download Microsoft's Media Player, click here
- To download Real.com's RealPlayer, click here

For those who choose not to download the video files, a transcript of their audio components is available. Note, however, that considerable information is lost without the images and sounds of the children's interactions.

- Download the Nobody clip
- Download the Sinking Flower clip

Observations and Discussion

What did you infer about the atelier as a language-filled place? Watching these clips with the same group of early childhood teachers as before, we found the Sinking Flower story to be truly delightful and a good example of the on-the-spot storymaking in play that contributes mightily to the young child's developing sense of story. It shows turn taking between the two girls, collaborating on a topic, and sequencing as the two girls build the story of the sinking flower. The unfolding of the story pushes the pair to use language as a means of clarifying ("Is that the water?") and explaining ("The flower is staying up forever. Why is that?"), and in the end, for resolving ("It sinked."). This dynamic, active language experience of storymaking goes a long way in developing that sense of story that is a mainstay of reading comprehension.

In the same clip, there is also evidence of using language to identify an activity -- namely, "scribble-scrabble" -- offering up a golden opportunity to use language as a way to name and describe, and to build vocabulary. The identification of the "scribble-scrabble" technique places further language demands on these artists as well, for the need arises to explain what it is ("Is that scribble-scrabble?" "No."), to speculate ("What if you do scribble-scrabble -- maybe it [the picture] will be so pretty."), and to elaborate (" I want to put all of these because they would make so pretty pictures."). The Sinking Flower clip, as we saw it, was filled with the kinds of language opportunities that are the building blocks of literacy -- naming, narrating, and connecting experience with word.

Through our discussion, we came to see the Nobody clip as illustrating the use of language to solve a problem and, in this case, one closely related to literacy: how to spell a word. It starts with a leading question from the teacher: "How do you think you spell *nobody*?" And the two girls take it from there, predicting, analyzing and reasoning to match sound with letter. Assisted by the teacher, the pair spell out the word and in the process make connections between speech sounds and printed symbols. Once again, the play environment supported the use of language in ways that help children rehearse and practice the very skills they will need in future encounters with text.

What did our group conclude about the art studio as a language-filled environment? Granted, two clips provide only a glimpse of the teacher and child talk that goes on daily here. Nonetheless, the clips offer vivid examples of language in use and, on the assumption they are representative, led us to surmise that the art

studio is a place filled with language in ways that lay the foundations for learning to read and write. Perhaps you inferred this, too, even as you recognized that the amount of evidence was slim.

Take-Aways from the Research Lesson

The purpose of the *koukai kenkyuu jugyou* is to illustrate, to critique, and to reflect so that we might take away from the research lesson more than we brought. The focus of this lesson was the play environment as a setting for early literacy teaching and learning activity. We had the good fortune to look in on the play of 17 four-year-olds, who were exploring the work of five modern artists as well as their own artful handiwork. We searched for evidence that their play environment was literacy rich and language filled -- conditions that descriptive research has found support early literacy development in the play context.

Turning from the lesson to thoughts of our own, several ideas seem to follow along. One is a deeper realization perhaps that literacy ideas, information, and processes need to be embedded in playful activity. The goal is not a play environment decorated with print, but rather a play environment networked with print so as to interrelate space, materials, and activity. In the case of the art studio, print was used to make connections between experience and ideas and to support constructions of new schemata and possibilities. It served a real purpose and, as a consequence, was purposefully used, which enriches individualsí knowledge, skills, and literacy habits.

Another idea that lingers is a deeper understanding of language as a primary connector between play and literacy, and an appreciation that the ways in which language is used by children in play builds and fortifies the mental structures they will need to construct meaning with printed texts. At play children use words to tell, to name, to report, to explain, to argue, to reason, and to create. Critical for young children at school is plenty of opportunity for talk in these ways with their peers and their teachers -- a primary reason that play belongs in the curriculum and should be well represented there.

Also lasting (and delightfully so) are images of the art studio as a literate place and what made it that way, and echoes of the children's talk there and how their playful opportunities to use language pulled them forward into literacy. The observational tools, too, helped to capture some of this and also hold out the possibility for us to do so again in research lessons of our own.

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Appendix: Overview of the Thematic Unit

Participants and setting

Seventeen 4-year-olds who attend half-day preschool at Hathaway Brown School in Shaker Heights, Ohio, USA. The children had recently been on a field trip to a local art museum.

Theme

"Colors, Dots, Objects, Shapes, and Drips: Making Impressions in Art"

Featured modern artists and artistic elements

Colors: Claude Monet
Dots: Paul Seurat
Objects: Jasper Johns
Shapes: Pablo Picasso
Drips: Jackson Pollock

Instructional aims

Supporting creative representation:
drawing and painting (symbolic representation through art)

Supporting classification:
exploring and describing similarities, differences, and attributes in artwork
using and describing materials in different ways in art activity

Supporting seriation:
comparing attributes in artists' work

Supporting literacy:
describing artwork
exploring writing and writing tools
reading in various ways (storybooks, signs, symbols and one's own writing)
dictating stories

Environment plan -- the art studio

Book browsing area (a sampling):

Little Blue & Little Yellow by Leo Lionni
Mouse Paint by Ellen Stoll Walsh
illustrated books of artists' work
posters of artists' work
postcards of artists' work
children's artwork

Writing table:
making a journal page about a favorite color
exploring letters and words on the color wheel
making rebus messages

The art workshop (atelier):
Pretend you are... (children mimic featured artistsí styles)
mixing, finding, testing colors (children do color experiments)
making art pieces
(children create through line drawing, wood sculpting, easel painting, mosaics, murals)

Bookmaking
The Artists' Book (whole-group descriptions about the featured artists)
My Many Colored Days (individual innovations on Dr. Seuss book)

Storybook reading
My Many Colored Days by Dr. Seuss
The Art Lesson by Tomie dePaola
Of Colors and Things by Tana Hoban
Pigasso and Mootisse by Nina Laden
The Science Book of Color by Neil Ardley

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Video Transcript

The "Nobody" Clip

Several children are seated at a work table, where they are writing with crayons and markers. The camera focuses on Ingrid.

Teacher: [off camera] You can write a little.... Very nice. You can write "To mom," or to whoever you're going to give it to.

Ingrid: To nobody.

Teacher: To nobody. OK. But how.... OK, but how do you think you spell *nobody* [pronouncing the word slowly, with emphasis on the first syllable]?

Ingrid: *N, o....*

Teacher: Good. And then what? *Body.*

The camera moves to show another child seated at the table beside Ingrid.

Caitlyn: *Nobody* [also drawing the word out and emphasizing the first syllable].

Teacher: OK, you've got the *no* part. What would... How would you...

Ingrid: *B...*

Teacher: Good! Good! Now?

Ingrid: *A?*

Teacher: Close. It's a vowel so it can...it has a funny sound.

Ingrid: *E?*

Teacher: No, well the next letter after the *b* would be *o. Nobod...* [drawing the word out, with emphasis on the second syllable]. What letter is this?

Several children together: *D!*

Teacher: Good. And then what? Now the last one is really hard. *Nobody* [emphasizing the final sound]. It...it sounds like --

Ingrid: [interrupting] *E.*

Teacher: Yes. Yes, it sounds like an *e,* but there's a letter way over here that sounds like that sometimes.... Like the *e,* and it's the *y.* Nobody. To nobody, Love Ingrid.

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The "Sinking Flower" Clip

Two girls, Vivian and McKenzie, are working in the painting area of the art studio. McKenzie is seated at the work table, gathering paper and supplies. Vivian walks around the table to McKenzie and begins speaking to her. In the background of their conversation can be heard the discussion and laughter of the other children who are busy in the room.

Vivian: Get...get all the colors. Maybe if you do scribble-scrabble...maybe it will be so pretty, if you do scribble-scrabble.

McKenzie: Deh-deh deh-deh deh-deh [repeating a "d" sound while dabbing with a paintbrush on to a sheet of paper].

Vivian: Is that scribble-scrabble?

McKenzie: No.

Vivian: What if you do scribble-scrabble -- maybe it will be so pretty.

McKenzie continues to paint as Vivian watches. When the teacher's voice is heard off camera, Vivian moves around the work table to where a stack of papers is lying.

Teacher: Vivian, would you like to do another picture?

Vivian: I want to put all of these because they would make so pretty pictures.

Vivian begins leafing through several pieces of paper, picking up two that appear stuck together and peeling them apart to reveal mirror-image paintings on each.

Teacher: You like to fold them together? You like to fold them together?

Vivian: Look at the pictures....

McKenzie: Look at mine. Oh! My flower is really sinking....

Vivian walks back around the table to where McKenzie is sitting, while McKenzie holds her painting up for the other girl to see.

Vivian: Oh!

McKenzie: Does this look pretty enough?

Vivian: [speaking to someone off camera, presumably the teacher] Look! The flower... Look! It's sinking.

McKenzie: Ahhhh! [squealing and giggling]

Teacher: Hmmmm...

McKenzie begins painting again, with Vivian looking on.

Vivian: Is that water?

McKenzie: Sort of. The flower.... No.

Both girls giggle.

McKenzie: The flower... The flower is staying up forever. Why is that?

Vivian: I don't know.... Oh! Now you're coloring the lamp!... It's sinking. It sinked.

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Author Information

Kathleen Roskos is a professor of education at John Carroll University (University Heights, Ohio, USA), where she teaches courses in reading theory and practice. Her research interests include children's play, teacher education, and teachers' professional development. She can be contacted by e-mail at roskos@jcu.edu.

Oula Majzoub Hanbali, a native of Beirut, Lebanon, is a graduate student in school counseling at John Carroll University. Her interests include instructional technology, counseling therapies, and languages. She can be contacted at oulamajzoub@hotmail.com.

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Transcript of the Discussion Forum

Editors' Note: When this article was posted in *Reading Online* in May 2000, readers were invited to comment on it through a bulletin board feature that was discontinued when the journal was redesigned in July 2000. Following are the comments posted to that bulletin board.

Readers who would like the opportunity to comment on this or other articles in the journal are invited to contact the authors directly (e-mail addresses available on the opening page or to post messages through ROL Communities.

Post 1

Author: Susan_Wallace
Date: 06-08-2000 11:42

It is apparent that in the nationwide frenzy to improve standardized test scores, a valuable aspect of early literacy is being threatened. I agree with the authors that the importance of play in early literacy learning might be misunderstood. It is one of our many jobs as early literacy educators to educate the public (mainly parents) and other educators about the importance of play in the process of learning to read and write."The goal is not a play environment decorated with print, but rather a play environment networked with print so as to interrelate space, materials, and activity." (p. 11) The koukai kenkyuu jugyuu was effectively presented with a balance of illustrations, critiques and reflections.

Post 2

Author: Tami_Wallace
Date: 06-14-2000 13:16

As I read this article, I couldn't help but to think back to this past school year. A first grade teacher at my school suggested that we should do away with recess and classroom centers because they interfere with valuable instruction time. I struggled with these comments, but I wasn't sure of an appropriate response to her opinion. After reading this poniant article, I think I will send it to her.

This article really helped me to understand the value of well constructed play centers in an early childhood classroom. I was able to grasp how conversation, and print help enhance a child's literacy. Reading the article enlightened me on how to organize centers so that they will be truley beneficial to children. I will remember these suggestions as I return to school in the fall.

Reply 2a

Author: Amy Strawser
Date: 06-20-2000 22:59

I teach two half-day kindergarten sections where I have integrated learning centers that foster literacy development and play. The children really enjoy this part of our day. Emergent writing and reading skills, a rich sense of language, problem-solving skills and cooperation are evident in each center. This article strengthed my belief in the importance of play in the literacy development of young children.

Reply 2b

Author: Cathie_Cullum
Date: 06-22-2000 20:13

After reading this article I am in total agreement with the authors. As a second grade teacher in a school that mandates 3 hours a day of reading instruction it is very difficult to find the time for constructive, educational play in the school day. However, I have found it important for me to fit this time in at least a few times a week. It seems that today children have forgotten how to play. I watch my students and they don't seem to know how to play "house", "school" or "store". They don't know how to interact with other children in a positive way. I feel it is important for me to give them the opportunity to learn these skills. Their language development is also fostered through this type of role play.

Reply 2c

Author: Linda_Harwood
Date: 06-26-2000 17:39

After reading the article on Play in Early Childhood, I felt a sense of relief. I thought that I was the only one left that still includes play in the Kindergarten Program. The Early Childhood philosophy is getting lost in test scores and rubriks. This author understands that integrating play and literacy makes learning exciting for

children. Teachers know that children do best when they are interested in what they are doing. Thank-you.

Post 3

Author: Cristan_Slusher
Date: 06-24-2000 11:03 This article reminds me why it is so important for children to be given time to play. After observing my own students last year I saw that many of my stuents did not know how to play an organized game with their classmates. Many times the teachers had to give the students an idea of what game to play. Many of our students do not have an imagination, they do not pretend when they play. I do not hear children saying things like, "let's pretend we I am the baby and you are the parent."

Next year, I will be teaching in first grade. I feel it is critical to the development of these children that they are given time to play and explore their environment. I plan to use many of the suggestions given by the authors as I plan learning centers in my classroom.

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If you enjoyed this commentary, you might be interested in these postings at the *Reading Online* site:

- Kindergarten Stories: Writing and Drawing at the Computer, an article by Susan Caroff, Ingridricia Kiefer, and Jennifer Roccograndi
- Critical Connections: Research on Early Reading Instruction, transcripts and comments from a conference on early reading edited and compiled by Margaret Hill and Leslie Ingridterson
- Reading: What Children Need to Learn and How Teachers Can Help Them, an article by Henrietta Dombey, "reprinted" from the United Kingdom Reading Association journal *Reading*

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